

## THE OLD WRITER AND HIS CONNECTIONS

By John F. Hall

When some older men finish with their careers and settle back into their retirement years, they think about their days of glory when their identities were based on their occupations and their titles. Recently, a friend, my age, told me that he was totally bored. I felt that he was suffering from a loss of identity. He lost his social network and social connection. He



lost the meaningful contributions that he felt that he was making before he retired. It's not the job or the money that men miss so much in retirement, but the socialization and self-esteem that work brings. Dr. Ken LeClair wrote: "The best thing that can happen to someone before they retire is that they hate their job at the end. Those that have loved it and are restructured out or pushed out have a harder time.

I completed three careers in my adult life: law enforcement, military, and revenue. The only job that I loved was the military. I was pushed out, by the Army, when I turned 60. I became a soldier the day I turned 17. I knew that my mandatory removal was coming. I wanted to stay another year or two, but I was worn out with a bad back and a bad foot. I paid the price for my glory days, of jumping out of helicopters and perfectly good airplanes. I travel to Fort Campbell once a month to sign for a controlled medication for my wife, Paula. My retired military identification card makes me a soldier for life. I am amazed when I drive back on Post and travel by the site where the 101st Division Headquarters once stood. It is now a perfectly cared for patch of grass. This is where it began for me 58 years ago. My mind remembers the General's words: "duty, honor, country." And I add the fourth word: "Christ."

Dr. LeClair was spot-on about my law enforcement career. My work schedule changed every two weeks and that played havoc on my health. When I was scheduled to work the night shift, I had to patrol 11 counties in Western Kentucky. That area covered Trigg County to the Mississippi River, and from the Tennessee state line to the Illinois state line. Many times, I would be the only Trooper on duty. I would use two to three tanks of gas driving from one incident or accident after another, to respond to dispatches. My dad wanted me to quit before I drove myself into the ground. He said, "They are getting expert help, dirt cheap." I waited until I could take an early retirement. The Governor wanted to reduce the number of state employees and he offered a two-year extra retirement bonus as an incentive to retire early. Once I retired, they realized that it was a mistake to let me retire so early. That was 32 years ago.

Mitch Anthony wrote, "Too often men underestimate the need for balance and the value of work and what work brings to them. When you don't have work, your leisure takes on a different meaning...it becomes your work...The lie behind the retirement model is that our age predicts our usefulness...It doesn't matter how much money you have in retirement, it doesn't give you purpose." I read Gail Sheehy's first book, many years ago, titled "Passages." In her second book, "Understanding Men's Passages," she wrote about

men: “Life offers many rich and varied seasons through the forties and the fifties and into the sixties and seventies and men can still be active and productive in the eighties...to express their passion and who feel they are making a difference.”

So in my seventies, I express my passion in my nonfiction story writing. I believe that I have a purpose, before they put me under the little grassy mound, in the Veteran's Cemetery south of Hopkinsville. I believe that I am making a difference in the lives of all of my grandchildren. I don't ask for, or want anything for my stories. I don't claim to be a good writer. I'm sure a college English professor can proof read my stories and the pages would drip red ink for all the grammatical mistakes that I make. I never expected Audrey Lambert, with the help of her husband, Mike, to put my stories online. I never thought that Trish Cunningham, or Mike Herndon, or Dr. Daniel Butler would enjoy my stories. They are valued connections.

My Christian Fraternity Brothers have given me positive feedback for the past three years that I have shared my stories with them. We believe that it is in helping others that all men can find purpose and usefulness. The college English professor will find that few of my stories have the four C's of story structure: concept, conflict, character, and casualty. My recent story, “The Road To My Front Door,” is about as close as I could get. I use song lyrics and scripture verses to drive home my theme. I believe that my stories make a small difference in the lives of the three young people that receive them in the mail. I want my stories to be inspirational, motivational, or entertaining to them. My story writing began in earnest when the pandemic hit. I decided to write one story a week and mail it to Jade, Skyler, and Lexie. Being a writer of nonfiction stories restricts what I can write. Strangely, when I feel that I have completely run out of things to write about, The Good Lord comes to my aid. It's like a treasure hunt. Once I finish one story, I go in search for another story. But the greatest treasure that anyone can find is Jesus Christ.

Mark Freedman wrote: “When older and younger people form meaningful relationships, it improves both groups' well being...Being truly generative means using our accumulated wisdom and experience, such as it is, to instill confidence in others, to help young people embrace risk and failure as the best route to learning, and do what ever it takes to find their own path to their destination. Our task is not to try to be young, but to be there for those who actually are...” In my relationship with the three young people, I have been doing what Mark Freedman suggests. From being there to watch them play sports; coming to their birthday parties and other special events. I try to be there for them if I can. Young people want to be cared about and loved. They are an important part of my connections.

I like to cite 1 Timothy, Chapter 4, Verse 12: “Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith in purity.” In 1874, Frances R. Havergal wrote the hymn “Take My Life and Let It Be.” Any words of wisdom that I give Jade Hakes, who calls me “Mr. John,” and Skyler and Lexie Crisp, who both call me “An-Father,” cannot compare to the wisdom found in the words in Havergal's hymn. These are her lyrics: “Take my life and let it be consecrated, Lord, to thee. Take my moments and my days, let them flow in endless praise. Take my hands and

let them move at the impulse of Thy love. Take my feet and let them be swift and beautiful for Thee...”

“...Take my voice and let me sing, always, for my King. Take my lips and let them be filed with messages from Thee. Take my silver and my gold, not a mite would I withhold. Take my intellect and use every pow'r as Thou shall choose. Take my will and make it Thine, it shall be no longer mine. Take my heart, it is Thine own, it shall be Thy royal throne. Take my love, my Lord, I pour at Thy feet its treasure store. Take myself and I will be ever, only, all for Thee.” Frances Ridley Havergal was born in 1836 in Astley, United Kingdom. She was an English poet, hymn writer, and so much more. The above hymn was her favorite. What I like about Frances is that she considered all of her many talents to be only loans from the Lord, to be used in His service.

The novel coronavirus has reduced my in-person contact with my church family. I attend online church services and mail in my church offerings. My compromised immune system would not survive the virus. I have found ways to stay connected with my Christian Fraternity Brothers via text, email, and Zoom teleconferencing. My grandson, John-John called me and needed something from my house. He came, mask on, and picked it up from the kitchen. We spoke briefly, from a distance, and he was gone. My granddaughters, Andrea and Heather call, to check on us. When I go to town on food runs, it is disheartening to see people, that I know, come into the grocery store with no masks on. That, to me, shows a personal disregard for their own safety, and a disrespect for the employees working in the grocery store.

This is an unusual week as Paula and I have to travel to Nashville, three days in a row, for medical treatments. In concluding this story, I know that my talents are very few, indeed. Writing stories is now what I mainly do. I'm the old writer and my connections are first with Christ, then my family, the three young people in this story, and all the others that receive my stories. My talent is on loan from Jesus Christ. I use it to give Him the honor and the glory.

John F. Hall

\*Read other stories by John F. Hall and others at:

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